

R 150609Z JAN 88
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6069
AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
INFO AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY RIYADH
AMEMBASSY MANAMA
AMEMBASSY DOHA
AMEMBASSY MUSCAT
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY SANAA

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 00224

PASS TO CONGEN DUBAI

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: THE RELIGIOUS SUCCESSION IN IRAN

REF: ABU DHABI 137

11. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT.

12. AN ARAB BUSINESSMAN IN REFTEL SAID THAT GRAND AYATOLLAH KHOI'S RELATIVES IN IRAN ALLEGE THAT SEVENTY PERCENT OF IRANIAN SHI'A, AND ALMOST ALL IRAQI SHI'A, FOLLOW KHOI'S INTERPRETATION OF ISLAM. WE HAVE RECEIVED MUCH THE SAME VERSION FROM ONE OF KHOI'S SONS HERE. WE ALSO RECALL EARLIER CONGEN DHAHRAN REPORTING THAT A SIMILAR PERCENTAGE OF SAUDI SHI'A ADHERE TO HIM.

13. WE TOO WOULD LIKE TO HAVE RELIABLE CONFIRMATION OF KHOI'S APPEAL IN IRAN. WE ARE NOT SO SURE ABOUT CONGEN DUBAI'S ASSESSMENT THAT KHOI'S POSITION MAY HAVE BEEN ERODED IN IRAN. AFTER ALL, KHOMEINI WAS IN NAJAF FOR FOURTEEN YEARS, WHICH DID NOTHING TO ERODE HIS STANDING IN IRAN. KHOI HAS BEEN IN NAJAF FOR MOST OF THIS CENTURY, FOLLOWING A TRADITION OF IRANIAN AYATOLLAHS THAT GOES BACK TO 1722. WE DOUBT, AS SUGGESTED BY REFTEL'S SOURCE, THAT KHOI HAS COME TO BAGHDAD OR THAT HE IS INVOLVED IN ANY WAY IN ANTI-KHOMEINI BROADCASTS. ALTHOUGH HE IS CERTAINLY NO FRIEND OF KHOMEINI, WHOM HE CONSIDERS AN UPSTART WITH DUBIOUS RELIGIOUS CREDENTIALS, HE HAS STEADFASTLY REFUSED TO TAKE SIDES PUBLICLY ON THE WAR.

14. WHETHER KHOI IS ACTUALLY A THREAT TO MONTAZERI OR ANY OTHER POTENTIAL SUCCESSOR TO KHOMEINI IS ANOTHER MATTER, SINCE KHOI, WHO IS NOW AGED AND INFIRM, IS NO MORE POLITICALLY ORIENTED, WE UNDERSTAND, THAN GOLPAYEGANI. KHOI HAS ALWAYS BEEN A STRONG PROPONENT OF THE QUIETIST SCHOOL OF AYATOLLAHS WHO INSIST THAT CLERICS SHOULD STAY OUT OF GOVERNMENT. UNLIKE KHOMEINI'S CASE, ALLEGIANCE TO KHOI'S RELIGIOUS INTERPRETATIONS DOES NOT NECESSARILY MEAN SUPPORT OF A POLITICAL NATURE. THE ISSUE, AS REFTEL POINTED OUT, IS THAT THE LEGITIMACY OF A SUCCESSOR REGIME WILL DEPEND TO A MAJOR DEGREE ON THE PERCEPTION OF ITS RELIGIOUS CREDENTIALS.

15. ONE ISSUE OF PARTICULAR INTEREST TO US IS THE PRINCIPLE OF THE USULI SCHOOL OF TWELVER SHI'A ISLAM DOMINANT IN IRAN THAT RULINGS OF A CLERIC, NO MATTER HOW PROMINENT, LOSE THEIR VALIDITY WHEN HE DIES, ENTIRELY UNLIKE THE SUNNIS OR THE MINORITY TWELVER SCHOOL WHO HAVE A CORPUS OF CANON LAWS. IT IS FOR THIS REASON THAT IRAN HAS A CLERGY AND THE ARAB STATES DO NOT IN THE SAME SENSE. WE WOULD THEREFORE EXPECT THE RULINGS OF KHOI, A VERY TRADITIONAL CLERIC, NOT TO OUTLIVE HIM. WHETHER KHOMEINI'S WILL IS THE QUESTION. IF SO, HE WILL BE THE FIRST AYATOLLAH TO HAVE A "CALIPH" (SUCCESSOR), AND SHI'A ISLAM IN IRAN AND ITS ROLE IN THE COUNTRY WILL BE CHANGED IN A SIGNIFICANT WAY.

